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STANFIELD HALL.

By J. F. SMITH,

Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.

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Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.  
AND OTHER EMINENT ARTISTS.

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not for the proudest earldom in a monarch's gift would I forego the triumph of this hour."

"Tis well," observed the Protector, signing a paper, which he threw towards the speaker; "take thy wish. Hamilton and the Ironsides will keep the guard; thou wilt command them."

"Your highness will not suffer any relenting visitings of pity——"

"Interfere between my justice and its victim?" added Cromwell, "No. By the Lord I have sworn it. I will keep my oath; *the traitor's already doomed*, and to-morrow's sun shall see his death."

"Their deaths, your highness means," said Barford, "since father and son alike are guilty."

"Wouldst bandy words with me?" demanded the Protector, haughtily. "Away at once. Thou hast thy boon; every favour save one thou ever wilt receive at the hands of Cromwell."

"And that?" demanded Barford.

"Time will show. Thou hast rendered us a service lately, assisted to unveil a treason to our eyes, and we are not ungrateful."

Before the traitor could reply, the speaker passed into an inner chamber, leaving him alone. Although possessed of the authority he wished for as a means of gratifying his hate of Herbert, Barford felt far from satisfied. True, there was nothing in the Protector's manner to excite his suspicion—he was even more condescending than usual; but with the consciousness of guilt the traitor felt uneasy.

The papers were, as he believed, still in the iron gauntlet. He had been twice to the Manor House to obtain them, but had been denied admission. Milton, who, like a minister of consolation, had taken up his abode there, produced an order from the Protector, which Barford, desperate as he was, did not venture to dispute.

"No matter," he thought; "the hate of years once satisfied, and Herbert dead, I'll send my sword through the usurper's heart. None 'neath my coronet will e'er suspect the masked executioner of Charles."

That same night, Newlight, Hamilton, and several other commissioners were busily occupied in the consultation room of Trinity College, arranging the disposition of the college plate. The preacher having formerly been a gyp, knew every secret place in the establishment.

It was in vain that some of the faithful servitors had concealed the most valuable portion, in the hope of preserving it for the college. Piece after piece, to their astonishment, was dragged forth. Not recognising Newlight, there was something marvellous to their eyes in the manner in which he conducted his brother commissioners from place to place, broke open the most secret recesses, and secured the imprisoned treasure. The butler was in



despair ! Each one suspected his fellow, and the work of spoliation seemed complete.

The plunderers were amicably discussing their arrangements, when the door opened, and Gripe tottered into the room. The fever of excitement which his nomination as commissioner had caused—for Cromwell kept his word with the old man—had once more stirred up the fever in his blood ; impatient avarice would brook no delay, and ill as he was, he had left his bed the instant he heard of the meeting. Hamilton welcomed him with a forced grimace of politeness ; Newlight, on the contrary, with the oily appearance of sincerity.

"Take your seat, brother," he exclaimed, extending one hand to him, while, with the other, he adroitly gathered up the papers lying scattered on the table ; "you are welcome. Alas ! it is an unthankful office you have chosen ; those who labour for the welfare of the State are seldom considered in the distribution of its favours."

"Perhaps not," said Gripe, bluntly ; "but I intend to take care of myself."

The commissioners exchanged looks with each other, as much as to say, "This is an awkward customer ; we must get rid of him."

"To facilitate our labours," resumed Newlight, "we have divided the committee into sections. The first and most important devotes itself to the inspection and management of the confiscated college lands. Perhaps," he added, blandly, "from your experience, you would like to take part in their goodly work ?"

"Who are the commissioners ?" demanded the old man, bluntly.

"His highness's son-in-law Major-General Ireton, Gordon, Bradshaw, and——"

"Enough," interrupted Gripe ; "I will not disturb their labours. By the time such stomachs are satisfied there will be little but the offal left. What chance should I have contending with such men ? Go on."

"Next," said Hamilton, impatiently, "there is the committee for estimating and disposing of the college libraries and useless edifices ; these no doubt——"

"Pshaw !" said Gripe, "books ! what do I know of books, unless it be the book of interest ? In a word, who has the management of the sale of the college plate ?"

"We," faltered the preacher, "have undertaken to——"

"I join your undertaking," said the old man, without giving him time to conclude his speech ; "I shall be useful there. What's this ?" he added, snatching a paper which Newlight held nervously against his breast ; "ah ! good ! Inventory of the plate of Trinity College."

"That is a private paper !" exclaimed the indignant preacher.

Gripe eyed him coolly for a second or two, and then quietly



told him that nothing could be private from the members of the commission.

"Let me see," he added, reading the list; "'silver fountain, presented by Queen Elizabeth to the College on the occasion of her visit, eight hundred ounces.' False! by Heaven! It weighs a thousand! I have cleaned it a hundred times, and can swear to its worth."

"There may perhaps be some slight mistake," observed the preacher, colouring to the temples, for even Hamilton was a stranger to his brother commissioner's roguery in this.

"Most likely," resumed Gripe, drily, continuing to read. "'King Henry's gold wafer cup, forty ounces.' Forty ounces!" he repeated, in a tone of indignation. "Fifty-two, as I am an honest man."

"It is false!" stammered Newlight.

"It is true!" retorted the old man, striking his knuckles on the table. "I had the care of it for more than thirty years, and have weighed it over and over again."

At this moment Ireton entered the room, and informed Hamilton that the Protector commanded his presence, to give directions for the execution in the morning.

"What," said Gripe, "are they going to shoot the Knight of Stanfield?"

"Ay, and his son."

"Well, well, well," muttered the old man, "they were sure to be betrayed at last, and I may as well profit by their death as another. They were kind to me, very kind," he added, musingly, for something like a pang of compunction for the traitorous part he had acted towards them shot across his heart; "but what could I do? I am old, very old, and poor. Few care nowadays for the poor."

As soon as Hamilton and Ireton left the room the preacher declared the sitting of the committee broken up, and as the rest were chiefly his or the absent commissioners' dependents, no opposition was made, except by Gripe, whose anxiety to realise, as he expressed it, would have induced him to sit up for a month rather than lose a chance of sharing in the plunder; consequently, he and Newlight in a few minutes were left alone.

"Now, brother," said the latter, blandly, advancing towards him, "return me that paper."

"No, no."

"If there has been any error it shall be rectified."

"It *must* be rectified. I see my presence frustrates your schemes. The old man knows too much to be welcome! Ah! ah! ah! Eight hundred ounces!—ah! ah!—a thousand, as I am a Christian man!"

"Can you suspect," demanded the preacher, trying to assume an air as like to injured innocence as possible, "that I would lend myself——"



"*Lend* thyself!" interrupted his companion, with a chuckle; "no, no; I know thee too well to suppose that thou wouldst *lend* thyself to anything."

"I trust so."

"But thou wouldst *sell* thyself," continued the speaker, "e'en though the devil were the purchaser, so he but offered gold enough—not that I blame thee much for that; it is a hard world, and the poor meet but scant kindness in it."

"What dost thou mean?"

"That, despite thy bands and thy Geneva cloak, I know thee—knew thee from the first."

Newlight started; for, although he perfectly recollected the old man, he trusted that long years of absence and change of dress had so altered his appearance that none would recognise him. Like Gripe, he had originally been a college gyp, and was dismissed for peculation—like many a rogue before him.

"This suspicion of one of my sacred calling—" observed Newlight.

The rest of the sentence was cut short by a low, hissing chuckle from Gripe, who, after he had fully indulged his mirth, answered, and whispered in his ear the name of Barnes.

"I do not understand thee," faltered the preacher.

"Thou liest!" replied Gripe; "though that is nothing new—thou didst so from a boy. Didst thou not rob thy master of his posset-cup, and lay the blame upon thy brother—plunder the buttery for the bed-maker's wife; and when at last detected in thy vile practices, wast thou not chased like a cur, and escaped the whipping-post a second time but by flight? Calling, quotha! the devil called thee; and ere thou couldst well speak, thou lisped in answer to him. Hast thou not upon thy shoulders the mark of the lash?"

"Well," said the fellow, doggedly, seeing that it was impossible to withstand the proofs of his identity, "I am Barnes—but I have repented of my evil ways, and I am now a chosen one in Israel."

"Pooh!" exclaimed the old man, with a gesture of contempt.

"Let us be friends," continued the detected rogue.

"I don't see how that will answer my purpose."

"I'll show thee how. We can play into each other's hands. We know the value of the prize. Let us decide it like brothers."

"Ay, now thou art reasonable."

"Thou shalt see the plate; there is a goodly store not yet included in the inventory."

"Where?" eagerly demanded Gripe.

"At my lodgings on the common. To-morrow thou shalt see it."

"It must be to-night."

"To-morrow, I say," repeated Newlight, feigning reluctance.



"And I say to-night," reiterated the old man, determined not to give him an opportunity of cheating him; "I will accompany thee. And so," he added, "thou hast reformed; I always thought there was a spark of grace in thee; but deal honourably with me or——"

"Fear not," said the detected knave, "thou shalt have little cause of complaint against me."

Playing upon the avarice of the wretched man, Newlight, as they left the college, continued to excite him by describing the various cups and bowls which he had abstracted, till they reached the common, when his manner suddenly changed. There was a blow, a struggle, and all was over.

The next morning the body of Gripe was found pierced with a deep wound under the ribs. None, of course, suspected the preacher—his death was attributed to the vengeance of the disappointed Royalists.

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The morning dawned brightly. At the back of Jesus College, on a waste piece of land, not far from the Old Manor House, a party of the Ironsides were drawn up, commanded by Hamilton. They were ranged close to a thick clump of trees. Herbert, his son, and Milton were upon the ground; and Barford, who had the entire direction of the execution, stood glaring on them with all the triumph of gratified hate.

"Farewell," said the Knight of Stanfield, grasping the poet's hand; "what follows may wring thy heart to witness, though mine is prepared to bear it. Protect my wife, O God!" he added, bursting into tears; "it is not for myself I feel, but for my boy, my gallant boy! His death will break his mother's heart!"

"Fear not for me," whispered the youth; "I cannot die in a better cause, and by my father's side."

"I will not leave thee," replied Milton, "till the last. These hands shall close thy dying eyes, these lips bear thy last blessing to thy wife."

A loud shriek was heard, and Mary, her hair dishevelled, was seen flying from the Manor House over the common, followed by the faithful Martin, who fain would have saved her the agony of witnessing the fearful scene about to be enacted. Ere he could overtake her she was folded in her distracted husband's arms.

"We will die together!" she exclaimed. "Monsters as they are, they dare not refuse me that! Herbert—son—is there no aid, no hope? Have they human hearts? Were they born of woman! God! husband and son both condemned! both lost!"

With hysterical sobs the frantic woman turned from her husband to caress her boy, whom she pressed to her heart as though she would make it a shield against the balls of the Ironsides.

"The time has arrived," said Barford, with a cold smile; "I can no longer delay. Take your places."



Mary regarded him with a fixed look, as if endeavouring to collect her scattered thoughts. Suddenly leaving her son, she rushed to Barford, and falling upon her knees, shrieked :

"Mercy ! mercy ! What have I done that thou shouldst change my days to sorrow ? How have I wronged thee ? Spare them ! my husband ! child ! If thou art human, spare them !"

Barford's reply to this was an insulting smile. Herbert advanced hastily towards his wife, and raising her from the ground, placed her half-fainting in the arms of Milton, saying as he did so :

"Plead not to that monster—he hath neither the will nor power to save us. Cromwell hath sworn, in the terror of his conscience, to show no mercy. Milton, our friend, our brother, has sued to him in vain. Send me not unmanned to my account. Retire, Mary, with thy brother."

"Stay but a moment," she faltered ; "my soul is on the wing—wait, for I come—I come——"

Exhausted by the intensity of her emotions, she sank senseless in the poet's arms. Anxious, if possible, to spare her the pang of witnessing their deaths, Herbert and her son imprinted a farewell kiss upon her still quivering lips, and hastily took their place ; Milton, at the same time, retreating with his senseless burden towards the house.

"Now then, Barford, do thy worst," said Herbert, throwing his arms round the neck of his son, as if to sustain him to the last ; "dying, I scorn and pardon thee ; not even to avoid this bitter hour would I consent to live a wretch like thee !"

"Present," ferociously shouted Barford.

The Ironsides levelled their guns at the two Royalists.

"Fire !" exclaimed a stern voice from the centre of the troop, which, previously instructed, instantly divided, and discovered Cromwell standing in the centre of them, holding in his hand the iron gauntlet and the proofs of Barford's treachery. The villain, at once comprehending that he was betrayed, laid his hand upon his sword, and rushed towards the Protector ; but the order was obeyed, the volley resounded, and he fell dead at the feet of the man he would have assassinated.

"What have you done ?" exclaimed the astonished Herbert.

"Their duty," replied Cromwell, calmly.

Milton and Mary, whom the report of the firing had suddenly recalled to life, rushed to the scene. As soon as she saw the iron glove in the Protector's hand, instinctively she seemed to comprehend it all. Falling on her knees, she could only falter "My son—my husband——"

"Are free."

"And your oath ?" whispered Milton to the speaker.

"Is kept," said Cromwell, sternly, at the same time placing his foot upon the body of Barford ; "the traitor is at my feet."



## CHAPTER XXIII.

JOY has its tears as well as smiles. Mary clasped her rescued boy and husband to her throbbing breast; so sudden was the change from misery to happiness, that she could scarcely trust herself to believe in its reality, it was so unexpected, so unlooked-for. Milton, in the purity of his friendship, the goodness of his heart, looked on and smiled. It was one of those scenes of bliss which angels love to watch, and which almost reconcile them to poor fallen humanity. Even Cromwell, cold and stern as was his nature, suspicious and doubtful as he had become of his fellow creatures, tasted for a few moments of that unalloyed pleasure which power feels when exercised to raise the innocent and crush the guilty. It was some time before either the poet or the rescued Royalists could understand the mystery of the scene which had just taken place.

"This," said Milton, approaching the Protector, "is the noblest use which power can make of the tremendous engine intrusted to its hand. Does not your highness feel at this moment a satisfaction more sweet than any dream which ambition realised, or hope e'er promised—the sweet sentiment of mercy?"

"Not of mercy only," replied Cromwell, "but of justice. This wretch," he added, pointing to the body of Barford, "this thing of clay, whose impulses were like his nature, vile, conspired against my life, pledged himself to the boy Charles Stuart to assassinate me, for an earldom—fit price for such a deed from such a hand! The cause must be a bad one which can sustain itself but by such ignoble means!"

"And my friends?" said Milton.

"Are free," continued Oliver. "It is but justice. The debt of gratitude still remains unpaid."

Herbert advanced towards the spot where the Protector and his friend had stood apart, witnesses of the joy of Mary and the reunion of three hearts which deemed themselves in this world for ever disunited.

"I cannot bend the knee to thee," he said, addressing Cromwell; "it would be but mockery, for thou knowest that its homage is devoted to another; but for the sake of these dear ones," he added, pointing to his wife and child, "I thank thee for my life preserved. From this time forth I sheath the sword, never to draw it forth again against thee."

"A happy wife and mother's blessing!" exclaimed Mary, at the same time kissing the hand of Cromwell, "rest upon thee! Thou has changed her tears to smiles, the desolation of her heart to sunshine! If, in the lonely hours of thy existence—hours from which neither power nor grandeur can exempt thee—sad memories



corrode thy heart, may thy remembrance of this one deed bring it the balm of peace !”

“Lady,” said the rough soldier of the people, “it is written, ‘Cast thy bread upon the waters, and after many days thou shalt find it.’ Deeds of mercy never perish—the wounded fugitive thy pity saved, made thee a promise in the hour of triumph to remember mercy ! As yet he hath but performed an act of simple justice, since accident proved thy husband’s conscience, in this most treacherous scheme, to be as clear as thine and Milton’s confidence in his unblemished honour. Hast thou no boon,” he added, “to ask which England’s Protector may accord to prove his gratitude ?”

Mary looked inquiringly upon her husband, to read his sentiment ; but Herbert was too proud to ask as a boon the restoration of estates which he knew had been unjustly sequestered. Seeing no sign of encouragement, she cast down her eyes and remained silent.

“If not of England’s ruler,” continued Cromwell, “of the soldier whose life thou didst preserve, e’en at a moment when that life was priceless, for England’s liberties depended on it.”

“Your highness,” answered the lady, respectfully, but firmly, “the service which I rendered was rendered freely. I make no traffic with humanity.”

A glorious smile lit the melancholy countenance of the poet, as he listened to the noble sentiment ; for he was formed by nature to appreciate all that was beautiful in art or lovely in virtue.

“Nor I with justice,” added the Protector, drawing from his belt a parchment, with the seal of the Commonwealth appended to it. “Lady,” he said, “stern as the world supposes me, my nature is weaker far than thine, since I would have paid my debt of gratitude by barren justice. This deed removes the sequestration both from thy husband’s and thy father’s lands—take it ; but, for his life preserved, Cromwell must still remain thy debtor.”

Without waiting to receive the thanks of the astonished Royalists, the speaker took the arm of Milton and retired from the spot, escorted by his faithful Ironsides ; whilst Herbert, with his wife and son, returned to the old manor-house.

Nothing could equal the delight of Sir Malcolm, on hearing that they were once more to return to the home of his fathers ; for although the old man, in his childishness, would sometimes imagine that he was still in his baronial halls, he felt strange and restless, was always complaining of the changes which had taken place, and had more than once reproached his daughter for not having waited till he was dead before she pulled down the old house to erect a new one ; in short, he was like a man in a dream with respect to Keinton, conscious, at times, that it was but a dream.



The preparations of the family were soon made; and the evening before Cromwell left Cambridge, the little party, escorted by Martin and a few faithful followers, set forth by easy stages for their future home.

It was a glorious evening, the one on which they approached the dilapidated seat of their fathers, when the towers first burst on the sight of Sir Malcolm. He clasped his hands and smiled. They were like the sight of long absent friends to him. Memories of old were awakened—thoughts of a lovely being who had called him husband, and a laughing child who named him father, succeeded next; and tears of deep content trickled down his silver beard.

"Home!" he murmured—"home! I shall die at home at last!"

"Don't speak of dying, Sir Malcolm!" exclaimed his faithful huntsman Martin, who led his palfrey by a guiding rein. "We shall have many a glorious carouse in the old walls yet, before the black flag waves from the keep in token of their noble master's death."

Despite the influence of the Independent minister who had replaced the orthodox clergyman in the village church, the major part of the inhabitants, hearing of the return of their ancient lord and his family, had come forth to meet them. Since the hall had been deserted, or inhabited only by the commissioner appointed by Parliament to manage the sequestered estate, the poor of the surrounding neighbourhood had felt the difference. Food was no longer distributed to the aged and infirm, work to the strong, or medicine to the sick. The rents had been remorselessly exacted, and many a regret was breathed in secret for the hasty-tempered but generous old knight, and the ministering angel his daughter.

It was at the principal entrance to the domain that the crowd first perceived the approach of the little cavalcade, and a loud shout of hearty welcome announced that they had once more entered on the lands of Keinton. The younger portion of the villagers rushed forward to cheer them, and several of the old men wept for joy at the sight of their old master. Grey heads, but warm hearts, thronged around the steed on which he rode; some kissed his extended hand; others, less fortunate, the housings of his saddle.

The feast was spread in the great hall of Keinton, which was fortunately situated in the part of the building least ravaged by the conflagration and attack of the enemy. Many relics, such as cups and pieces of plate, which had been preserved by the affectionate devotion of the farmers and peasantry, were produced, and the hospitable board, though shorn of its ancient splendour, still presented a goodly array of wassail bowls, hanaper cups, wafer stands, and black jacks, whose silver-mounted rims and hoops bore various dates and quaint inscriptions.



Sir Malcolm, assisted by Mary, and surrounded by his grandchildren, was conducted to his seat at the head of the table. It was the very oaken chair in which for centuries the lords of Keinton had sat. Martin took his usual place behind his master's chair. No sooner was the old man seated, than a loud shout burst from the tenants and villagers who were crowded round the lower end of the hall, and the cry of "Long live Sir Malcolm!" was mingled with blessings on the Lady Mary and her children, and prayers for their prosperity.

The knight, although he had been for several years, from his great age, in a state bordering on childishness, seemed to throw off the weight of a score years at the sound. His blue eye flashed with its former intelligence as he gazed upon the scene. His first glance was at his child and her offspring, his next at the old walls hung with the portraits of his race, which had witnessed many a stately revel. Memory returned, and tears of calm and deep delight slowly trickled down his venerable face. Something seemed to be playing the deuce with old Martin—his features worked convulsively, and once or twice he wiped his eyes with the cuff of his blue-coated livery, which he had donned in honour of the occasion.

"Fill me my father's cup," said Sir Malcolm, pointing to the chalice-like looking vessel, probably the relic of some suppressed monastery; "fill it to the brim. Before the lethargy of age returns, I would fain drain it to the health of my faithful friends and servitors in the old hall of Keinton."

The cup was presented to him.

"If I cannot thank you as I would," resumed the old man, "blame the times and not your ancient master, who returns to the home of his fathers poor in all save honour and loving-kindness to those who have remembered him in his absence. If I have been a hasty, impetuous lord of Keinton, I trust I have not been an unkind one."

"No, no!" shouted the men, many of whom were as grey-headed as the speaker; "Long live Sir Malcolm! God bless our lady and her children!"

"Perhaps," said Sir Malcolm, "this may be the last time I shall ever address you, for I am old, very old; but my children's children will remain amongst you. Love them as you have loved me—serve them as faithfully as you have served me, and may you never know a worse master than I, with all my faults, have been. God bless you! thank you! bless you!"

The speaker drained off the cup, notwithstanding the anxious looks of Mary, who feared that so unusual a libation, joined to the excitement of his return, would injure her father's health, which was feeble as the lamp of life in a new-born infant; but, to the surprise of all, he took his seat, and did the honours of his board



with the self-possession of former years. The tenantry and peasants were regaled upon the lawn, and frequently the loud echo of their mirth caused a pause in the conversation in the baronial hall.

"Martin!" exclaimed the old knight, for the first time perceiving that the huntsman had donned the livery of his house; "strip off that blue-coated badge; and never, while I live, let me see thee in it again."

"Sir Malcolm!" exclaimed the astonished huntsman.

"Strip! strip! I say!" impetuously added his master, seeing that he hesitated; "am I not lord of Keinton—of the lands of my forefathers—in my old seat again? Here, while I live, my will, at least is law. Is it not, Mary?"

"Here and everywhere to me, dear father," replied the daughter, gazing on him with looks of pride and filial affection.

Martin saw that his master was once more in possession of all his former faculties, and felt that a moment like the present was not one in which his pleasure ought to be disputed; he therefore, without further observation, stripped off the livery which he had donned with so much pride in honour of the day.

"Here old Honesty," exclaimed the knight, pointing to a seat beside him; "here to-day must be thy place; here, beside the master—the friend," he added, "whom thou hast served with unexampled fidelity; here in the bosom of the family who are united to thee in all but blood."

The colour mounted to Martin's cheeks; he would have spoken, but could not; the words were choking him. Despite his modest resistance, the children gathered round him, and gently forced him into the seat by their grandfather's side; a feat which they accomplished amid the approving smiles of Mary and her husband.

Oh, they were happy that night, when after dinner the chairs were drawn round the huge fire which burnt briskly in the hall. The children, however, could not long remain seated, but gathered in a knot round their grandfather's seat, and eagerly questioned him touching the history of the steel-clad knights and stately dames whose portraits seemed to smile complacently upon their descendants from the wall. The youngest, a rosy little cherub two years old, was seated on the old man's knee, her hand entwined in his long silver beard.

Fearful of the effect which excitement might produce upon a frame already so debilitated as her father's, Mary several times would have persuaded him to retire to rest, but he declined. The day before he would have obeyed her with the simplicity of a child. Each time she urged her request, he would reply, looking round the circle with a smile of delight:

"Not yet, Mary, not yet;" and then the children would renew their questions and their mirth.



The night was advanced when his daughter, for the last time, pressed her request.

"Well, well," he said, "be it so. But before I go, Mary," he added, "seat thyself, as thou wert wont to sit when a child, at my feet, and sing me my favourite song; it is years since I have heard it."

"Not to-night, dear father; my heart is so full of happiness that——"

"To-night," said the old man, interrupting her; "I feel that I shall sleep soundly if I hear it once again."

The young people joined their request to their grandfather's, and Mary, despite her reluctance, was forced to comply, although it was not without a tremor of indefinite apprehension that she commenced the song.

"Stay," said her father, as the first notes broke tremulously forth; "thy lute, thy lute."

Martin was sent to seek it. While he was gone, the cup of the knight was filled by his grandson, and he drank to them all and blessed them. There was something solemn in the act. Mary, she knew not why, was affected to tears; she exerted herself, however, to throw off the impression, and partially succeeded.

Martin entered the hall with the instrument, and placed it in his mistress's hands. As her fingers swept the chords, awakening the well-remembered air, her father, with a smile like that of a pleased child, gently closed his eyes, and let his head fall back in the chair, as if to catch the melody he loved. The words of the song were suited to the scene and feelings of those who were gathered round:

I love the vast halls where my fathers of old,  
When the cup circled round, their quaint legends told;  
And with welcome's warm words, hearts as free as their door,  
Had a smile for the wealthy, a tear for the poor;  
Where the banquet was graced by woman's sweet smile,  
Who controlled its excess, yet adorned it the while;  
And whose eyes flash'd as bright as the glare on its walls,  
As she moved through the dance in my father's old halls.

At the end of the symphony, which Mary played upon her lute at the conclusion of the first verse, a deep sigh broke from Sir Malcolm, and a tear was observed to steal down his withered cheek.

"Father," gently whispered his child, "these feelings are too much for you. I will finish the song another time to you."

"No, no. Go on."

"Not to-night."

"Go on, Mary," said the old man, in the tone of a child disturbed from its sleep; "pray go on. I am happy while I hear you—quite happy."

There was no possibility of refusing a request so urged. The



Lady of Stanfield continued her strain, but this time with her eyes anxiously fixed upon her father's countenance :

How gay were those halls when old winter had drest,  
Each carved oaken beam in its holly-green vest ;  
And the noble and brave, youth and beauty met there,  
To welcome old winter and laugh away care.  
Then soft lips were pressed, then breathed the deep vow,  
And the white berries plucked from the mistletoe bough ;  
Such once were the scenes in those time-honoured walls,  
When old Christmas kept house in my fathers' old halls.

The last cadence died trembling away upon the lips of the singer, for the recollection of other days came over her as she sang her father's favourite song ; she had been no higher than his knee when he first taught it her ; and many a mingled scene of joy and tears had passed since then in the chequered drama of her life.

"What a sweet melody," observed her eldest son ; "no wonder grandfather is so fond of it. But see," he added, "how calmly he sleeps."

Herbert turned his eyes towards the chair, and observed that the head of Sir Malcolm had slightly fallen upon his breast. Still he was far from suspecting that he more than slept.

"You had better wake your father, Mary," he observed ; "the excitement of the day has been too much for him. The hour is getting late ; 'tis time that he retired to rest."

His wife rose from the cushion upon which she had been seated at Sir Malcolm's feet, and, leaning over the chair, would have awakened him with a kiss ; but the instant her lips touched his venerable cheek, a shriek escaped her, and she sank senseless in her astonished husband's arms. The Knight of Keinton was dead ; the feeble breath of life had passed away while he was listening to the song he had taught his girl in childhood,—the song which reminded him of home and the hundred tender associations connected with that dear word—associations which no other spot can weaken, or time or absence destroy ; for they are amongst the first which the heart receives and retains the longest. A week after the return of Sir Malcolm to the halls of his fathers saw him consigned to their tomb in the village church, where an altar tomb, with half-effaced escutcheons, still marks the spot where rests the stout old Royalist.

In the course of the following year it became evident to all who had an opportunity of approaching his person, that the days of the Protector were numbered ; his body was perishing, whilst his mind still retained its healthful vigour on every point save one—the dread of assassination haunted him ; he wore armour under his clothes, feared poison in every dish, and at times looked with suspicion even upon those whom years of fidelity and the ties of blood entitled to his confidence. By the Act which the obsequious



Parliament had passed, his son Richard was named his successor. At times he was doubtful even of him—the son of his blood. Such was the fatal effect produced by the various conspiracies against his life, acting upon a morbid imagination. Cromwell found, at the last stage of his existence, that he had purchased greatness at the price of happiness. His general residence was at Hampton Court, and, upon state occasions, St. James's. His Court was distinguished, not only for the irreproachable purity of its morals, but for the illustrious names which graced it. Foremost of these was Milton, his friend in youth and frequent monitor.

Pale and emaciated, Oliver was seated in his cabinet arranging his papers, destroying some and numbering others, when a gentle tap at the door disturbed him. It seems his highness was accustomed to the signal, for, without turning his head, he said, "Come in!" and Dick of the Belt, one of the few who still retained his confidence, entered the apartment.

"Well," demanded Cromwell, "what is thy report?"

"I have nothing to report, your highness," replied the honest soldier; "neither mutiny amongst the men nor disaffection in the City."

"Thou art too honest, Dick. The truthfulness of thine own heart renders thee unsuspecting of the falsehood of others. Hast seen no sinister glances fall at thy approach—observed no whisperings in my household? The very curs who fawn upon me, and eat my daily bread, plot against my life! I doubt them—doubt all mankind! At times I doubt e'en thee!"

"You are wrong, then, your highness."

"Perhaps," replied the sick man, musingly, "perhaps—perhaps."

"These fancies, your highness, are destroying you," said Dick, without offering the least reply to the implied suspicions, which he passed over, although he felt it keenly, as he would the fancy of a sick child. "Show yourself more amongst the people."

"What! give the assassins the opportunity they seek?"

"Review your Ironsides," continued the soldier; "the sight will warm your blood."

"Never again," interrupted Cromwell; "'tis sluggish, cold, frozen at the heart. The dark shadow of the tomb is on me, and I must die!—die with my glorious plans but half-achieved, with England's liberties unsettled—thwarted—thwarted, where most I looked for aid. The old, old leaven of corruption is at work amongst the people, and Richard," he added, in a low tone, speaking rather to himself than his hearer, "will prove unable to contend with it. He hath a kind heart, but a weak one. Oh, but for one year of my former energy!—but one year—one year!"

"Trust me, your highness has many years to live; report speaks wonders of your new physician—the great German doctor, Martin Shultz."



"He is a stranger."

"But friend of Milton," added Dick of the Belt, who knew how unbounded was the speaker's confidence in the integrity of the poet. "Sergeant Hakabut was all but dead of the slow fever which consumed him, till he followed the prescriptions of the stranger. You should see him now, your highness; he can bear harness with the best man in the regiment."

Oliver remained for several minutes silent, as if meditating some important resolution: rising from his seat, he walked at last towards a steel casket which stood upon one of the marble consoles in the room; and opening it with a key which he wore suspended from a black ribbon round his neck, he drew from it a paper, carefully folded, and placed it in the soldier's hand.

"What is this, your highness?" demanded Dick of the Belt.

"Life or death's warrant," answered the Protector, gloomily; "a spell to thaw the frozen current of my blood or keep it ice for ever. Doff thy gear, and dress thyself like a citizen; ride to London; thou knowest Cheapside?"

"As well as my horse its manger."

"Seek one of the foreign chemists who reside there, no matter which—there may be safety in the very hazard; give him this prescription, and lose not sight of him till it is compounded. Observe him well," he added; "if his eye meets not thine freely, if he hesitates, asks idle questions, or seems ill-disposed, seek out another; breathe to no human ear thy errand, not even to thy wife; repeat it not to thyself, but do it as 'twere a secret thing 'twixt Heaven and thee; and now depart—there needs no protestations from men approved like thee."

Dick of the Belt, after carefully concealing the prescription in his doublet, saluted the speaker, and left the cabinet without a word, more proud of the confidence reposed in him than if the Protector had named him captain of the Ironsides—in his opinion the highest dignity man could attain on earth.

"Yes," said Cromwell, as soon as he was alone, "I will struggle with the grim phantom Death. Why should I fear the contest? I have braved his frown in many a hard-fought field, nor felt one throb of fear. My days as yet are far from old; my energies unwasted. 'Tis but to will to live, and live. Charles!" he added, as if apostrophising some invisible being near, "the day is long, far distant yet, ere I confront thee at the Judgment-seat; and when it comes I'll meet it as firmly as I e'er met thee in the battle-field. The cause—the cause was good—in that I place my trust. God, as posterity, will judge alike between a people's sufferings and its tyrant's downfall."

With these words the speaker rescaled himself at the table, and once more became occupied in the arrangement of his papers.

Cheapside, before the Great Fire of London, which did not take



place till the reign of Charles II., was comparatively a narrow street, with overhanging houses, whose quaintly-carved balconies and gables denoted the domestic architecture of the Tudors; many of the mansions were of still earlier date. Amongst the oldest of these was a low wooden hostel, known by the name of the Pilgrim's Rest, chiefly frequented by foreign traders and country dealers arriving in the metropolis to supply themselves with merchandise or barter their wares. It had also long been known to the proscribed Royalists as a secure asylum, when circumstances rendered their presence in London indispensable to the furtherance of the plots which were continually carried on for the restoration of the king, an event not more impatiently desired by Charles than by his party, especially the clerical portion of it, whom the Independents had driven from their livings, and persecuted with more fanaticism than prudence; for few men hate so deeply, or conspire so perseveringly, as priests, no matter of what church. Fortunately, the truths of religion cannot be affected by the sacerdotal fury of those who abuse it.

A number of guests were taking their morning draught in the great room of the hostel, and talking over the news of the Protector's reported illness, when Dick of the Belt, dressed in the habit of a plodding citizen, made his appearance amongst them. Although his black doublet and steeple-crowned hat were of the most pacific character, there was a certain stiffness in his carriage and decision in his step which, to the practised eye of a military man, indicated at once that he either was, or had been, a soldier. His object, on entering the house, was to ascertain, if possible, the name of the principal chemist in the street, without compromising his errand by any direct questions. For this purpose he seated himself near to a quiet-looking personage, whom, from his costume, he took to be a foreign trader, and called for his morning draught. A group at the lower end of the table were eagerly discussing the news and the politics of the day.

"I tell you," said one, whose language bespoke a condition far above his appearance, which was that of a scrivener's clerk, "that he cannot recover; the only man who could have saved him—the renowned Dr. Martin Shultz—has been dismissed; he will trust to no one, so great is his fear of being poisoned. Captain Seekgood told my master as much when he came to give directions for drawing up his marriage contract with the widow of Alderman Stuffit."

"Is the widow rich?" demanded a rakish-looking man, whose doublet denoted that he was in bad odour with his tailor.

"Her good man left her a fortune of ten thousand pounds," was the reply.

"What!" exclaimed the questioner, "ten thousand pounds?—and throws herself away upon a rascally crop-eared knave who, to my







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